Insight

The Department of Physics offers excellent education in the field of physics. Whether your career goal is teaching, working in technology or scientific research, or daring to make the next great breakthrough in our understanding of the universe, we offer a physics degree tailored to your dreams.

Experience

Our goal is to provide the best undergraduate education in physics. By choice, we don’t have a graduate program! Instead, we are focused on our undergraduates. All of our classes are taught by professors selected for their commitment to quality teaching. No massive lecture halls full of stadium seating in this major; instead, your core physics courses are capped at 36 seats. This allows for quality mentorship and individualized instruction.

We offer hands-on research, both during the school year and during our Physics Summer Research Investigations (PSRI) program. Current research experiences available to our students include instrumentation development, stellar formation, femtosecond spectroscopy, ultra-cold atoms, lasers and optics, quantum sensing, and computational modeling of the solar interior.

We have an active Society of Physics Students chapter and a brand-new science building.

Outlook

Our students go on to careers in research, teaching, industry, programming, entrepreneurship... Want specifics? Look at any cell tower. See devices with a lightning-bolt logo? That company was started by a California State University, Chico physics grad. Another recent graduate built a lab company that tests commercial devices for (UL) certification. See devices with a lightning-bolt logo? That company was started by a California State University, Chico physics grad. Another recent graduate built a lab company that tests commercial devices for (UL) certification. You may take this course for a maximum of 1 unit

Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 100 Introduction to Astronomy: Survey of the Cosmos 3 Units GE
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course provides an overview of modern physical theory, emphasizing the approach of science in understanding our place in the universe. The student discovers how simple, fundamental physical principles enable us to understand key features in diverse physical systems: from the radiometric dating of early hominid ancestors to the measurement of the expansion rate of the Universe. The course emphasizes our current understanding of astronomy, solar system formation, stellar evolution, and cosmic evolution. This in turn leads us to investigate the physical conditions salient to life on Earth, and ways in which these conditions are ‘rare’. 2 hours activity, 2 hours discussion. (007392)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 102 Thinking Like a Physicist 1 Unit
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Prerequisite: Recommended: For students who have not met other PHYS 202A prerequisites such as MATH 118 or High school trigonometry.
Corequisites: PHYS 202A.
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 1 unit
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 109 Paths to Success in Physics 1 Unit
Typically Offered: Fall only
A university success course for physics majors new to California State University, Chico. Appropriate for all incoming freshman and transfer students. This course explores academic and career opportunities in physics and related fields, introduces current topics in physics, acquaints students with resources available on campus and provides an introduction to physics research. 1 hour lecture. (021291)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 1 unit
Course Attributes: Lower Division

Courses and Degrees

Undergraduate

Bachelor’s

• Physics BS (https://catalog.csuchico.edu/colleges-departments/college-natural-sciences/physics/physics-bs/)

Minors

• Physics Minor (https://catalog.csuchico.edu/colleges-departments/college-natural-sciences/physics/physics-minor/)

Credentials


See Course Description Symbols and Terms (https://catalog.csuchico.edu/academic-standards-policies/course-description-symbols-terms/) for an explanation of course description terminology and symbols, the course numbering system, and course credit units.
PHYS 202A  General Physics I  4 Units  GE
Prerequisite: High school physics; High school trigonometry, and second-year high school algebra or MATH 118; or concurrent enrollment in PHYS 102.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Mechanics, properties of matter, wave motion, sound, heat. Science majors are encouraged to take PHYS 204A instead of this course. 3 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007394)
General Education: Laboratory Activity (B3); Physical Science (B1)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 202B  General Physics II  4 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 202A with a grade of C- or higher.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Light, electricity, magnetism, selected topics in modern physics. Science majors are encouraged to take PHYS 204B instead of this course. Algebra and trigonometry are used. 3 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007395)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 202X  Physics Problem Session  1 Unit
Prerequisite: Concurrent enrollment in PHYS 202A.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Designed to supplement PHYS 202A with additional applications of introductory physics. Provides the student with the opportunity for additional assistance in developing problem-solving abilities. 2 hours activity. (007398)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 202Y  Physics Problem Session  1 Unit
Corequisites: PHYS 202B.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Designed to supplement PHYS 202B with additional applications of introductory physics. Provides the student with the opportunity for additional assistance in developing problem-solving abilities. 2 hours activity. (007399)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 204A  Physics for Students of Science and Engineering: Mechanics  4 Units  GE
Prerequisite: High school physics or faculty permission. Concurrent enrollment in or prior completion of MATH 121 (second semester of calculus) or equivalent.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Vectors, kinematics, particle dynamics, friction, work, energy, power, momentum, dynamics and statics of rigid bodies, oscillations, gravitation, fluids. Calculus used. A grade of C- or higher is required before progressing to either PHYS 204B or PHYS 204C. 3 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007401)
General Education: Laboratory Activity (B3); Physical Science (B1)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 204B  Physics for Students of Science and Engineering: Electricity and Magnetism  4 Units
Prerequisite: MATH 121, PHYS 204A with a grade of C- or higher.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Charge and matter, electric field, Gauss’ law, electric potential, capacitors and dielectrics, current and resistance, magnetic field, Ampere’s law, Faraday’s law of induction, magnetic properties of matter, electromagnetic oscillations and waves. Calculus used. 3 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007402)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 204C  Physics for Students of Science and Engineering: Heat, Wave Motion, Sound, Light, and Modern Topics  4 Units
Prerequisite: MATH 121, PHYS 204A with a grade of C- or higher.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Temperature, first and second law of thermodynamics, and kinetic theory. Waves in elastic media, standing waves and resonance, and sound. Ray and wave optics, reflection, refraction, lenses, mirrors, diffraction, and polarization. Selected topics in modern physics. Calculus used. 3 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007403)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 204X  Physics Problem Session  1 Unit
Corequisites: PHYS 204A.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Designed to supplement PHYS 204A with additional applications of introductory physics. Provides the student with the opportunity for additional assistance in developing problem-solving abilities. 2 hours activity. (007406)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 204Y  Physics Problem Session  1 Unit
Corequisites: PHYS 204B.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
Designed to supplement PHYS 204B with additional applications of introductory physics. Provides the student with the opportunity for additional assistance in developing problem-solving abilities. 2 hours activity. (007407)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Lower Division

PHYS 298  Special Topics  1-3 Units
Prerequisite: Department permission.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course is for special topics offered for 1.0-3.0 units. Typically the topic is offered on a one-time-only basis and may vary from term to term and be different for different sections. See the Class Schedule for the specific topic being offered. 3 hours supervision. (007412)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course more than once
Course Attributes: Lower Division
PHYS 300  Introduction to Modern Physics: Relativity and Quantum Theory  3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 204A, PHYS 204B, PHYS 204C, or PHYS 202A and PHYS 202B and calculus with faculty permission.
Typically Offered: Fall only
This course focuses on the radical changes in our conception of the physical world that emerged in the early 20th and 21st centuries. The course begins with the theory of special relativity, which altered our understanding of the nature of space, time, matter, and energy. The course's middle section is devoted to the introduction of quantum theory. The last section introduces particle physics, general relativity, and cosmology. 2 hours activity, 2 hours discussion.  (007417)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 301  Analytical Mechanics  3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 204B, PHYS 204C, PHYS 314 (may be taken concurrently).
Typically Offered: Fall only
Newton's laws of motion, particle dynamics, accelerated reference systems, central force problems, conservation laws, celestial mechanics, many body systems, rotational motion, rigid body dynamics, Euler's equations, Lagrange's and Hamilton's formulations, oscillating systems, and waves. 3 hours discussion.  (007419)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 302  Electricity and Magnetism  3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 204C, PHYS 314.
Typically Offered: Spring only
Vector analysis; electrostatic fields and potentials; Poisson's equation, boundary value problems and multiple expansions; dielectrics, magnetostatics, magnetic fields in matter, Maxwell's equations, field energy and momentum, Fresnel equations, propagation of electromagnetic waves in dispersive media, waveguides and coaxial cables, radiating systems. 3 hours discussion.  (007422)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 307  Physics of Music  3 Units GE
Prerequisite: GE Oral Communication (A1); GE Written Communication (A2); GE Critical Thinking (A3); GE Physical Sciences (B1); GE Life Sciences (B2); GE Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning (B4) requirements, or consent of the instructor.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course is intended for non-science majors and explores the deep connection between physics and music. Basic principles of physics and scientific reasoning are taught in the context of the production and perception of music, emphasizing the historic and scientific interplay between physics and music. No previous knowledge of physics or music is assumed. Through learning the physical concepts used to describe music, students are able to extend their understanding to additional examples of physical phenomena. 3 hours lecture. (021877)
General Education: Upper-Division Scientific Inquiry/Quant Reason (UDB); Innovation, Design, and the Arts Pathway; Science, Technology, and Society Pathway
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 309  Physics Associates Program  1 Unit
Prerequisite: Faculty permission.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
The course provides two hours/week of physics tutoring. 2 hours activity.  (007429)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 312  Computational Physics  3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 204B.
Corequisites: PHYS 204C.
Typically Offered: Spring only
This course prepares physics majors to be self-sufficient in personal computer use to solve experimental and theoretical physics problems. Topics include, but are not limited to, analysis of experimental data, projectile motion, random processes, vector fields and potentials, vibrating systems, and electric circuits. 2 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory.  (007411)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 314  Methods of Theoretical Physics  3 Units
Prerequisite: MATH 220, MATH 260, PHYS 204B.
Typically Offered: Fall only
This course provides students with the skills needed to apply advanced topics in mathematics to upper-division physics problems. It focuses on applications of calculus, multi-variable calculus, differential equations, linear algebra, Fourier techniques, partial differential equations, and boundary-value problems to physics problems in classical mechanics, EM, and other advanced physics courses. 3 hours lecture. (022045)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 315  Thermal Physics  3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 300. Recommended: MATH 361.
Typically Offered: Spring only
This course develops the laws of macroscopic equilibrium thermodynamics along with applications to representative physical problems. The course concludes with an investigation of the microscopic statistical properties underlying these laws. 3 hours discussion. (021447)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 327  Electronics for Scientists  4 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 204B, PHYS 204C.
Typically Offered: Spring only
This course is an introduction to basic laboratory electronics for scientists. Topics include fundamentals of linear and non-linear circuit elements, operational amplifiers, simple digital circuits, A/D and D/A conversion, noise reduction, introductory-level LabVIEW programming, and an introduction to microcontroller systems. A weekly three hour lab gives students experience in designing, building, and debugging circuitry for laboratory/control tasks. 3 hours laboratory, 3 hours lecture. (021423)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 4 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division
PHYS 341  Advanced Inquiry into Physics  3 Units  
Prerequisite: SCED 141; or PHYS 100; or PHYS 202A and PHYS 202B; or PHYS 204A, PHYS 204B, and PHYS 204C.  
Typically Offered: Fall and spring  
This course builds on concepts developed in the introductory physics course in greater mathematical and representational sophistication. There is a significant emphasis on participation in and reflection on scientific inquiry. Topics addressed include kinematics, electrostatics and electrodynamics, simple machines, and wave phenomena. 4 hours activity, 1 hour discussion. (020986)  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 376W  War and Peace in the Nuclear Age (W)  3 Units  GE, W  
Prerequisite: GE Oral Communication (A1); GE Written Communication (A2); GE Critical Thinking (A3); GE Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning (B4) requirements, or consent of the instructor.  
Typically Offered: Fall and spring  
This course explores the fundamentals of nuclear physics, and how these fundamentals give rise to energy release in both bombs and power plants. The course also focuses on how the nature of nuclear physics has influenced international relations. One main goal for students is to understand the scientific issues sufficient to make intelligent choices as citizens. 3 hours lecture. (007363)  
General Education: Upper-Division Scientific Inq/Quant Reason (UDB); Equity, Ethics, and Policy Pathway; Global Studies Pathway  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division; Writing Course

PHYS 398  Special Topics  1-3 Units  
Typically Offered: Spring only  
This course is for special topics offered for 1.0-3.0 units. Typically the topic is offered on a one-time-only basis and may vary from term to term and be different for different sections. See the Class Schedule for the specific topic being offered. 1 hour lecture. (007415)  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course more than once  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 399  Special Problems  1-3 Units  
Typically Offered: Fall and spring  
This course is an independent study of special problems offered for 1.0-3.0 units. You must register directly with a supervising faculty member. 9 hours supervision. (007416)  
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 427W  Advanced Laboratory (W)  3 Units  W, GW  
Prerequisite: GE Written Communication (A2) requirement, PHYS 300, PHYS 327.  
Typically Offered: Fall only  
Experiments involving atomic and nuclear physics, measurement of physical constants, chaos, solid-state physics, and general-purpose laboratory skills techniques including computerized data collection and analysis. 2 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (007437)  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division; Writing Course; Graduation Writing Assessment

PHYS 435A  Quantum Mechanics I  3 Units  
Prerequisite: PHYS 300; either PHYS 314 or MATH 361.  
Typically Offered: Fall only  
A survey of one-dimensional and three-dimensional solutions to Schrodinger's equation designed to build an understanding of commutator algebra and Hilbert space. Formalisms associated with angular momentum and spin are included. 1 hour activity, 2 hours discussion. (007441)  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 435B  Quantum Mechanics II  3 Units  
Prerequisite: PHYS 435A.  
Typically Offered: Spring only  
This course extends the use of Schrodinger's equation with a variety of approximation methods to study physical systems including atomic physics, nuclear structure, and scattering problems. 3 hours discussion. (007444)  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 450  Optics  3 Units  
Prerequisite: PHYS 204A, PHYS 204B, PHYS 204C.  
Typically Offered: Fall only  
Geometrical and physical optics, interference, diffraction, reflection, dispersion, resolution, polarization, fiber optics, laser optics, and holography. 2 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (002549)  
Cross listing(s): EECE 450  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 451  Lasers and Their Applications  3 Units  
Prerequisite: PHYS 204C. Recommended: EECE 450 or PHYS 450.  
Typically Offered: Spring only  
The theory and mechanism of laser action, various types of lasers and their applications and future use. Laboratory involves measurements with lasers, fiber optics, data transmission, and holography. 2 hours discussion, 3 hours laboratory. (002550)  
Cross listing(s): EECE 451  
Grade Basis: Graded  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 489P  Internship in Professional Physics  3 Units  
Prerequisite: PHYS 300 and faculty permission.  
Typically Offered: Fall and spring  
This is a supervised internship in professional physics. This internship may take place at a university, government laboratory, or private sector company. This course may be taken more than once. It cannot be used for the minor in physics. 9 hours supervision. (007447)  
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit  
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 15 units  
Course Attributes: Upper Division
PHYS 489T Internship in Physics Teaching 3 Units
Prerequisite: PHYS 327 and faculty permission.
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This is a supervised internship in physics teaching which will take place in a local high school physics classroom. This course may be taken more than once, but a maximum of 3 units of any PHYS 289 may be counted toward the degree. This course cannot be used for the minor in physics. 9 hours supervision. (007448)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 15 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 492W Communicating Physics (W) 3 Units W
Prerequisite: GE Written Communication (A2) requirement, junior standing, open to Physics majors only.
Typically Offered: Spring only
Presentation and discussion of current physics literature and/or special studies of students and faculty, in professional journal form, other written forms, and in seminar presentation. 2 hours discussion, 1 hour seminar. (022057)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 3 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division; Writing Course

PHYS 498 Special Topics 1-3 Units
Prerequisite: Upper-division standing in physics, faculty permission.
Typically Offered: Inquire at department
This course is for special topics offered for 1.0-3.0 units. Typically the topic is offered on a one-time-only basis and may vary from term to term and be different for different sections. See the Class Schedule for the specific topic being offered. 1 hour seminar. (007450)
Grade Basis: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course more than once
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 499 Special Problems 1-3 Units
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course is an independent study of special problems and is offered for 1.0-3.0 units. You must register directly with a supervising faculty member. 3 hours supervision. (007451)
Grade Basis: Credit/No Credit
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Upper Division

PHYS 697 Independent Study 1-4 Units
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course is a graduate-level independent study offered for 1.0-4.0 units. You must register directly with a supervising faculty member. 9 hours supervision. (007456)
Grade Basis: Report in Progress: Graded
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Graduate Division

PHYS 699T Master's Thesis 1-6 Units
Typically Offered: Fall and spring
This course is offered for 1.0-6.0 units. You must register directly with a supervising faculty member. 9 hours supervision. (007461)
Grade Basis: Report in Progress: CR/NC
Repeatability: You may take this course for a maximum of 6 units
Course Attributes: Graduate Division

Physics Department
The Faculty
Paul C Arpin 2014

Assistant Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Colorado At Boulder

Eric J Ayars 2003
Chair
Doctor of Philosophy North Carolina St Univ At Rale

Eric J Ayars 2003
Professor
Doctor of Philosophy North Carolina St Univ At Rale

David T Brookes 2015
Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Rutgers Univ New Brunswick

Kendall P Hall 2021
Assistant Professor
Doctorate Univ Of Wisconsin-Madison

Lynda M Klein 1986
Lecturer
Master of Science Univ Of Cincinnati Main Campus

Yuhfen Lin 2016
Lecturer
Doctor of Philosophy Ohio St Univ Main Campus

Kevin M McLin 2021
Lecturer
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Colorado At Boulder

Nicholas J Nelson 2015
Associate Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Colorado At Boulder

Sheraz Khan Omarzai 2006
Lecturer
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Cal-Santa Cruz

Hyewon K Pechkis 2016
Associate Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Connecticut

Joseph A Pechkis 2016
Assistant Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Connecticut

Anna I Petrova-Mayor 2008
Professor
Doctor of Philosophy University of Hohenheim

FNU Sushilkumar Sreekumar 2021
Visit Ay
Doctorate Univ Of Texas San Antonio

Mahendra B Thapa 2016
Lecturer
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Cincinnati Main Campus

Xueli Zou 2000
Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Ohio St Univ Main Campus

Emeritus Faculty
Cheuk K Chau 1975
Emeritus
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Illinois Urbana Campus

Eric R Dietz  1983
Professor
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Cal-Berkeley

Christopher A Gaffney
Emeritus
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Notre Dame

Lorin E Millet  1967
Emeritus
Doctor of Philosophy Brigham Young Univ

Robert L Paulson
Emeritus
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Cal-Davis

John C Young  1970
Emeritus
Doctor of Philosophy Univ Of Cal-Davis